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Reflections on The Bay of Pigs

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IN TELLING the story of the Bay of Pigs, Haynes Johnson has, unfortunately, omitted an important footnote to history in the part of his narration that refers to the high councils within the Kennedy administration at which the decision to send Brigade 2506 into action was made.

It was the advice submitted by Thomas C. Mann, assistant secretary of state for Latin American affairs. Mann declared himself for the invasion but only if full support would be furnished to the men of the brigade by the United States. If we were going to launch the invasion, Mann declared in those critical councils, we should do so with success. Else, he pointed out, the repercussions of failure would be disastrous.

If adequate support would not be forthcoming he insisted, then we should not undertake to sponsor the venture. His advice went unheeded.

The author also asserts that "the outline tactical plan for the invasion was sent to the Pentagon, approved at a subordinate level and then reviewed by Gen. Lyman Lemnitzer, chairman of the joint chiefs of staff, the nation's supreme military authority, and Adm. Arleigh Burke, chief of naval operations. On Feb. 3, they, too, indorsed it and predicted success."

Only they can attest to the accuracy of the above. But it is significant that no mention is made of a review by the chief of the air staff, Gen. Thomas D. White, at the time. He, too, was a member of the joint chiefs of staff.

It is known that the tactical plan was not reviewed by the western hemisphere division of the air staff, the deputy chief of staff of which was Maj. Gen. Thomas C. Darcy, now retired. Darcy, who was thoroly familiar with operational capabilities thruout the Caribbean, never saw the outline tactical plan.

It is doubtful that any examination of the plan at a subordinate level at the Pentagon could possibly have been complete without an examination by the air staff.

Maj. Nino Diaz, whose planned landings in Oriente province and later at the La Paz Bank in the Bay of Pigs area, were aborted, will testify that he was orally promised three days of aerial bombardment to support his force of 158 men [10 fewer than recorded in the book] before he set sail from Louisiana.

Diaz, who fought successfully in the mountains of Oriente in 1958 as commander of Castro guerrilla columns and then was one of the first officers to turn against him in 1959, infiltrated back into Cuba in 1960. From October thru December, 1960, Diaz roused the peasants in the countryside against Castro in Oriente.

That is why he was chosen with the first group that was sent to the jungle training center in Panama to prepare for the invasion of his homeland. Yet, despite his personal knowledge of the terrain and the people, he was not consulted in the planning for Operation Mars which was to be his diversionary landing in Oriente. The operation order gave Diaz this mission:

"Infiltrate Oriente province, organize, direct, and control operations designed to harass, interdict and isolate Castro security elements and ultimately gain control of the operational area."

Another point for dispute in Johnson's interesting history of the Bay of Pigs fiasco is his assertion that President Kennedy authorized the navy to use retaliatory fire against Castro's forces in order to rescue the members of Brigade 2506 from the beach. This is the first time that alleged order has been mentioned and it appears to contradict reality.

If President Kennedy issued such an order, there was no effort on the part of our navy to effect a Dunkirk rescue operation at the Bay of Pigs. While some men who escaped from the beachhead were picked up by destroyers in the initial voluntary evacuation, there was no order issued to flee the beach. On April 21, 1961, a United States destroyer did evacuate about 20 men from the 5th battalion from a bay about 20 miles

west of the Bay of Pigs. There were no Castro forces there. The fishing boat that was loaded with paratroopers and men from headquarters company, and aboard which about 12 men, including Maj. Alejandro Del Valle, the paratroop commander, died at sea, was heading on April 19, 1961, towards a destroyer when the vessel turned 180 degrees and sailed away. The boat drifted for 19 days in the Caribbean and the Gulf of Mexico until the survivors were picked up by a tanker.

Johnson errs when he claims to be the first to relate the tragedy of what happened aboard the ill-fated boat. The story was first told in THE CHICAGO TRIBUNE in May, 1961, in an interview with one of the survivors when he rejoined his family in Miami. He was José Alberto Daussa, an attorney, who was judge advocate of headquarters company.

Also, the author says that the news that four United States pilots who were shot down and killed in the action at the Bay of Pigs was not reported until March, 1963. That is not so. Castro announced this action on April 18 and 19, 1961. Shortly thereafter a gentleman in Atlanta, professing to be the attorney of the four men, released their names as having been killed at the Bay of Pigs. The story was given a bigger play in February, 1963.

The four United States pilots were not authorized to fly those missions. According to Cubans who were at the base, the U. S. pilots decided to check the authenticity of the intelligence brought back by the Cubans in their debriefings that the Castro anti-aircraft fire was murderous. The Cubans had refused to fly further missions without fighter protection.

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